

Shocking disparities in child obesity now exist in New Zealand

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(Medical Xpress)—Public health researcher Professor Tony Blakely from the University of Otago, Wellington says the time for prevaricating about obesity is over with the release of latest child obesity figures by the Ministry of Health.

"I'm used to researching inequalities in [health](#) in New Zealand," says Professor Tony Blakely, "but I'm shocked by the latest figures on [child obesity](#) which show an increase rates from 8% in 2006/7 to 11% in 2011/12, and in particular the extreme inequalities that we now have in New Zealand.

Combining obesity and overweight categories, 17% and 23% of Māori and Pacific children now fall in this grouping, compared to 7% and 6% of European and Asian children.

"But perhaps the most shocking [inequality](#) is the six-fold gap between the most deprived (19% either obese or overweight) and least deprived (3%) neighbourhoods in New Zealand," he says.

Some of this deprivation gap in child overweight/obesity is due to Māori and Pacific children being more likely to live in deprived areas, but the reality is that we now have extreme inequalities between rich and [poor neighbourhoods](#). Not only does this create disparities in health now, but it bodes badly for diabetes, cardiovascular and cancer inequalities in the future if action is not taken.

Actions needed include:

- Banning all junk food advertising during children's TV viewing hours
- Making sugar-free drinks the norm, not high sugar soft-drinks, through regulation, taxes and the industry stumping up to its responsibilities
- Ensuring schools and other [public institutions](#) provide healthy food
- Making healthy food the easy option for all New Zealanders, through subsidies or removing GST on fruit and vegetables combined with possible taxes on fatty and [sugary foods](#).

"Other aspects of the latest health survey results are encouraging," says Professor Blakely.

"Reductions in youth smoking are welcomed, but more modest gains in adult smoking reinforce the need for more concerted tobacco policy to extend and reinforce recent tax increases."

Provided by University of Otago

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